

Describing a table

Learn how to summarise information in a table and write a report on the main features.

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and tips and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. versus
2. a mother tongue
3. roughly
4. to illustrate
5. a correlation
6. a billion
7. striking
8. prominence

Definition

- a. to show
- b. the state of being easily seen or noticed
- c. compared to
- d. a native language
- e. approximately; more or less
- f. attracting people's interest or attention
- g. a connection or relationship between two facts
- h. 1,000,000,000

Reading text: Describing a table

The table below gives information about some of the world's most studied languages. Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features, and make comparisons where relevant.

Language	Number of people learning the language	Number of native speakers	Number of countries where the language is spoken
English	1.5 billion	527 million	101
French	82 million	118 million	51
Chinese	30 million	1.39 billion	33
Spanish	14.5 million	389 million	31
Italian	8 million	67 million	29
Japanese	3 million	123 million	25

The table illustrates some interesting facts about some of the world's most popular languages to learn. It allows comparisons between the number of people who study a language versus those who speak it as a mother tongue, and shows how many countries have speakers of each of the languages.

The prominence of English is striking. 1.5 billion people are learning English compared to only 82 million studying the second most popular language to learn, French. English is spoken in 101 countries, roughly twice as many as French and three times more than Chinese. English is the only language with more learners than native speakers.

In terms of native speakers, Chinese is the most spoken language, more than double English with 1.39 billion. It is the third most popular language to learn with 30 million learners. Spanish has over five times more native speakers than Italian, but proportionally fewer learners at 14.5 million for Spanish and 8 million for Italian. As for Japanese, it is the least studied language of those given with 3 million learners.

Overall, more people are learning English than the other languages combined and English is spoken in the highest number of countries. However, Chinese has by far the greatest number of native speakers. There seems to be little correlation between how many native speakers there are of a language and the number of learners, but there is a stronger link between the number of learners and how many countries have speakers.

Please note: *This page was designed for writing practice only. Information and statistics in the table may not be accurate.*

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Tips

1. Start by saying what information is shown. If you are writing in an exam, try to avoid repeating the same wording as the question, e.g. *The table illustrates some interesting facts about some of the world's most popular languages to learn.*
2. In the second paragraph give an overview of the most important features of the information.
3. Be selective and choose the key observations and trends. You don't have to write about every single detail.
4. Divide your observations into paragraphs about different aspects of the data. A concluding paragraph is not always necessary.
5. Don't use your own general knowledge to give reasons for the data or to add more information than is shown. The question only requires you to summarise and report the data in the table.
6. Use a variety of structures for:
 - making comparisons, e.g. *slightly more than, by far the highest, as ... as, compared to, double the number of, correlation between*
 - approximating, e.g. *nearly, roughly, almost*
 - stating what you are referring to, e.g. *in terms of ... , as for ... , of those given.*

Tasks

Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	Answer	
1. The introduction should restate the question in your own words.	True	False
2. In the second paragraph you should include detail about one part of the information.	True	False
3. It's OK if you don't include everything from the table in the answer.	True	False
4. You should think of reasons for the statistics and include them in your answer.	True	False
5. You should use a variety of language for comparing.	True	False
6. You must always include a conclusion.	True	False

Task 2

Match the words and phrases with the same meaning.

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. altogether | a. 50 per cent fewer |
| 2. almost half | b. double the number of |
| 3. half as many | c. combined |
| 4. twice as many | d. roughly half the number |
| 5. a correlation | e. more than |
| 6. over | f. a relationship |

Task 3

Complete the sentences with words and phrases from the box.

far	twice	illustrates	striking	As for
correlation	given	terms	compared	

- This table the numbers of learners, native speakers and countries where the language is spoken for some of the most popular languages to study.
- The prominence of English is
- 1.5 billion people are learning English to 82 million studying French.
- English is spoken in roughly as many countries as French.
- In of native speakers, Chinese is the most spoken language.

6. Japanese, it is the least studied language of those
7. Chinese has by the greatest number of native speakers.
8. There seems to be little between how many native speakers there are of a language and the number of learners.

Discussion

Which language apart from English would you like to learn?

Answers

Preparation task

1. c
2. d
3. e
4. a
5. g
6. h
7. f
8. b

Task 1

1. True
2. False
3. True
4. False
5. True
6. False

Task 2

1. c
2. d
3. a
4. b
5. f
6. e

Task 3

1. illustrates
2. striking
3. compared
4. twice
5. terms
6. As for | given
7. far
8. correlation